

MYZANTHA GARRULA, *Vig. and Horsf.*

Garrulous Honey-eater.

Merops garrulus, Lath. Ind. Orn., Supp. p. xxiv.

Chattering Bee-eater, Lath. Gen. Syn., Supp., vol. ii. p. 154.—Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. viii. p. 171.

Chattering Honey-eater, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. iv. p. 164.

Philemon garrulus, Vieill. 2nd edit. du Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxvii. p. 427.—Ib. Ency. Méth. Orn., Part ii. p. 616.

Myzantha garrula, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 319.

Cobajgin, Aborigines of New South Wales.

Miner, Colonists of Van Diemen's Land.

VAN Diemen's Land, and all parts of the colonies of New South Wales and South Australia, are alike inhabited by this well-known bird. It has never yet been observed in northern or western Australia, its place being supplied in those parts of the country by other nearly allied species. On comparing examples from Van Diemen's Land with others killed on the continent of Australia, a difference is found to exist in their relative admeasurements, the Van Diemen's Land birds being more robust and larger in every respect; still as not the slightest difference is observable in the markings of their plumage, I consider them to be merely local varieties and not distinct species.

The natural habits of this bird lead it to frequent the thinly timbered forests of *Eucalypti* clothing the plains and low hills, rather than the dense brushes, and so local is it and so exclusively does it confine itself to such situations that the edge of a river frequently forms the boundary of its habitat: for instance, it is very abundant on the northern side of the Derwent near Hobart Town, yet never did I meet with it on the opposite shore during the whole of my stay in Van Diemen's Land excepting many miles up the river, where the trees and land on both sides appear equally suitable to its habits.

The Garrulous Honey-eater is not truly gregarious, but moves about in small flocks of from four to ten in number. In disposition it is unlike any other bird I ever met with, for if its haunts be in the least intruded upon it becomes the most restless and inquisitive creature possible, and withal so bold and noisy that it is regarded as a troublesome nuisance rather than an object of interest; no sooner does the hunter come within the precincts of its abode than the whole troop assemble round him and perform the most grotesque actions, spreading out their wings and tail, hanging from the branches in every possible variety of position, and sometimes suspended by one leg, keeping up all the time one incessant babbling note: were this only momentary or for a short time, their droll attitudes and singular note would be rather amusing than otherwise; but when they follow you through the entire forest, leaping and flying from branch to branch, and almost buffeting the dogs, they become very troublesome and annoying, awakening as they do the suspicions of the other animals of which you are in pursuit.

The food of this bird is of a mixed character, for although it loves to dwell among the branches of the flowering *Eucalypti*, from the pollen of the flowers of which it obtains much genial food, it preys with avidity upon insects, both those resorting to the flowers of the gum-trees and those—coleoptera, &c.—peculiar to the ground; it is consequently often to be seen descending in pursuit of insects, particularly under the large trees on the grassy open plains. The stomach is of the same diminutive size as the rest of the Honey-eaters, but, as might be supposed from the varied character of the food, is much more muscular.

The nest is cup-shaped and about the size of that of the European Thrush, very neatly built of fine twigs and coarse grass, and lined either with wool and hair, or fine soft hair-like strips of bark, frequently mixed with feathers: it is usually placed among the small upright branches of a moderately sized tree. The eggs, which are thirteen lines long by nine and a half lines broad, are of a bluish white, marked all over with reddish brown, without any indication of the zone at the larger end so frequently observable in the eggs of other species.

The sexes offer no other external difference than that the female is a trifle smaller than her mate.

Face grey; crown of the head dull black; ear-coverts and a crescent-shaped mark inclining upwards to the angle of the bill glossy black; all the upper surface light greyish brown; the feathers at the back of the neck tipped with silvery grey; primaries dark brown margined externally with grey; secondaries dark brown on their inner webs, the outer webs grey at the tip, and wax-yellow at the base; tail greyish brown, with dark brown shafts, and all but the two centre feathers largely tipped with brownish white; chin grey, a patch of dark brown down the centre; under surface grey; the feathers of the breast with a narrow crescent-shaped mark of brown near the tip of each; irides dark hazel; naked space beneath the eye, bill and feet yellow.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size, drawn from specimens killed in Van Diemen's Land.